

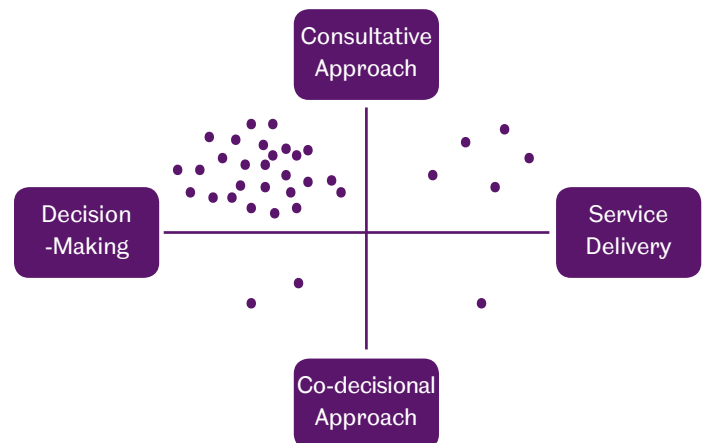
MoPAct Policy Brief: 8

Promoting the Participation of Seniors in Policy-Making

Policy priority Legislate to create local advisory bodies to represent the views of seniors on key issues such as primary healthcare, long-term care, transport and urban mobility.

Summary:

- The involvement of seniors in policy-making in Europe is more common at the local level.
- Seniors are less likely to be involved in the implementation of services.
- The involvement of seniors in policy-making is mostly done through the creation of consultative bodies (ex. Seniors' Councils or Seniors' Forums).
- The direct engagement of senior citizens is less frequent, and is more common that initiatives involve individual (elected or nominated) delegates or representative organisations.



Key findings:

Although senior citizens show high levels of engagement in political life, for example through voting in elections, there is little evidence of their influence over political decisions that affect them. Not only that, senior citizens often feel they cannot influence the political debate, and show low levels of collective action (e.g. petition, protests, occupations, etc.) (Goerres, 2009).

The involvement of senior citizens in public policies that address the challenge of demographic and individual ageing has become a key political issue in recent years (Eurostat, 2012; WHO, 2002). As stated by UNECE (2009): “[a]t a time when policies are made to prepare countries for the challenges of ageing societies, it is crucial to integrate those actually affected into the political process” (ibidem: 4).

Not only the political field, but also NGOs and senior lobbies have argued the case for greater senior citizens’ engagement in public policy design and delivery. Increasingly attention is being paid to participatory policymaking together with the diffusion of global evidence-based contributions on, inter alia, social innovation and co-production: *“In public service delivery, this refers to having*

service users actively involved in their services, working with frontline workers using their skills, knowledge, and experiences, rather than as passive recipients” (AgeUK, Engaging with Older People Evidence Review, p.5).

Participation in policymaking means the involvement of senior citizens through different processes and activities. Activities are always related to the kind of participatory process run with senior citizens. Understanding the variety of processes and activities run through participatory methods, means understanding the ways senior citizens are encouraged to express their voice in new public arenas.

The participation of senior citizens in policymaking requires that public and statutory authorities and senior citizens agree to debate, negotiate, and deliberate over public policies in public arenas. These arenas can adopt different methods to mainstream senior citizens’ views and voices in policymaking. At the one extreme, public authorities may seek senior citizens’ input through consultative processes; at the other extreme, public authorities may choose to share decision-making responsibilities jointly with senior citizens.

Approach and methods:

We conducted an extensive search of current (or recent) programmes/ initiatives aimed at involving the participation of senior citizens in aspects of policymaking in Europe. Of a total 87 programmes/initiatives found, we selected a sample of 37 for which there was sufficient and reliable evidence. These programmes/initiatives were then grouped according to their focus (decision-making or policy implementation) and the type of participatory approach adopted (consultative or co-decisional).

From this sample, we selected 3 Best Practices that, based on the information obtained up to that point, promised the greatest potential in promoting the participation of senior citizens in the policy-making process:

- *Senior Citizens' Councils*, Denmark (best practice in the adoption of a consultative approach in decision-making processes)
- *Partnership for Older People Programme (POPP)*, Dorset, UK (best practice in the adoption of consultative approach in policy-implementation processes)
- *Senior Citizens' Participatory Budget*, Alfândega da Fé, Portugal (best practice in the adoption of a co-decisional participatory approach in policy-making)

These Best Practices were the object of *peer reviews*¹ that were designed to help us identify the factors that can enhance (or hinder) the participation of senior citizens in policymaking. The findings of this Policy Brief are the product of those *peer reviews*.

Policy Recommendations:

- **Commitment is Paramount.** Participation needs public statements of commitments between political authorities and civil society.
- **Beware of Diversity.** Political authorities should take into consideration the ways senior citizens from different social status - not only of highly-educated citizens – and different ages – as the older senior citizens aged +80 – can have access and participate to the initiative.
- **Invest in Training.** The agencies in charge for the organisation of participatory initiatives should invest on training activities for the actors involved in the process.
- **Acknowledge the Benefit of Good Communication.** Civil society should have the chance to be informed about the state of the art of the policies to be debated, and should also be regularly updated about the advancement of the participatory process.
- **Be Comprehensive in Your Approach.** Political authorities should make sure that participatory initiatives are sustained by broader institutional changes aimed at overcoming entrenched bureaucratic processes and addressed to improve open public data systems.



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